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## Antiphonal Song in the Black Butcherbird *Cracticus quoyi* in Darwin

Duetting, in which two birds sing simultaneously, is a common occurrence, especially among medium sized tropical passerines (e.g. Diamond & Terborgh 1968; Diamond 1972). Antiphonal singing, in which two birds sing phrases alternately to produce an integrated melody, is less commonly reported. Duetting is well known in various Australian and New Guinea species of butcherbirds (Macdonald 1973; Frith 1976; Coates 1990), but neither duetting nor antiphonal song appear to have been recorded for the Black Butcherbird *Cracticus quoyi*. This paper reports on the occurrence of antiphonal song for this species in the Darwin region.

The Black Butcherbird is common in mangroves and remnant riparian forest in the Darwin region. Between July 1988 and July 1993 I conducted an early morning census of birds on about 18 days per month. The census followed a regular route including residential streets, parkland, mangroves and riparian vegetation bordering Rapid Creek. Two pairs of Black Butcherbirds, presumed to be the

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same resident individuals, were commonly recorded along sections of the route. They were frequently seen and heard calling from mangroves, and less often encountered in parkland and gardens, generally within about 50 metres of mangroves.

Though less melodious than other butcherbirds, the Black Butcherbird has a variety of rich calls. These show considerable geographic variation, at least in the New Guinea region (Beehler *et al.* 1986; Coates 1990). In Darwin, the species is particularly vocal at dawn when their loud calls may be heard up to a kilometre away.

Antiphonal songs of Darwin birds were always composed of simple phrases in two similar variants. The phrases were also commonly given by solitary individuals. When singing antiphonally, two birds usually perched one to two metres apart within the same tree, but on one occasion were in different trees, about ten metres apart. One bird (Bird 1) was always perched higher, and began each sequence of calls with a low-pitched, rather muted and slightly guttural (a) double ("croo-croo") or (b) single ("ork") note. Bird 2 followed with louder, higher-pitched, more melodious calls: (a) a disyllabic, upward-inflected "oo-wa", or (b) a trisyllabic "oodle-oo" (Fig. 1). In the latter trisyllabic call, the first and last notes were of the same pitch; the second lower, and shorter in duration. Both variants were delivered once or repeated several times, at the rate of three sequences in five seconds.

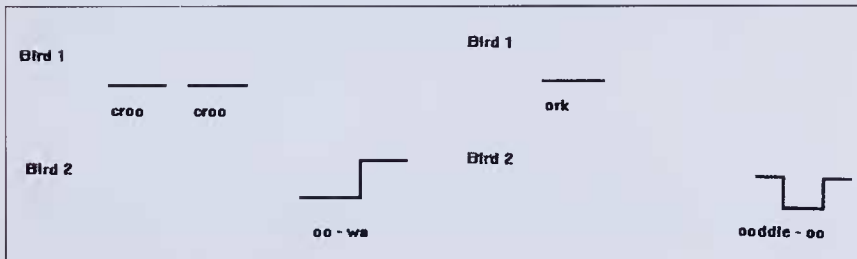


FIGURE 1. The two main song phrases of the Black Butcherbird

Antiphonal singing has only been observed clearly in the late dry season (September to November) when birds are presumably preparing to breed. It may be associated with establishing or re-affirming territories. Twice, I saw two pairs engaged in bouts of aggressive pursuit interspersed with antiphonal song at a territorial boundary. Since the species is sedentary and apparently maintains territories throughout the year, however, it is possible that pairs engage in antiphonal singing throughout the year. Further studies may clarify if this is so, and if song varies within Australian populations.

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## First Record of the Spectacled Monarch *Monarcha trivirgatus* for the Northern Territory

The Spectacled Monarch *Monarcha trivirgatus* is found in coastal eastern Australia, New Guinea, and many islands of eastern Indonesia, including Timor (White & Bruce 1986). In far north Queensland it is sedentary, but breeding populations in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales migrate north during the winter (Blakers *et al.* 1984), probably mostly destined for the Trans-Fly region of southern New Guinea (Beehler *et al.* 1986). In Australia it inhabits rainforests and occasionally mangroves (Blakers *et al.* 1984; Boles 1988), while in Timor it occurs in lowland evergreen and semi-deciduous forests, as well as scrub (RN, pers. obs.).

During an avifaunal survey of mining leases on Groote Eylandt, we recorded this species in a patch of coastal vine forest, c 24 km south of Alyangula, on 16 September 1991. Two birds were found: an adult and an immature, the latter recognisable by the lack of black on the face, the lores being whitish-grey, the throat, dark grey (see Slater *et al.* 1986), and the base of the bill being pale yellow. Both birds were present on the following day (RN), but the site was

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